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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 001723

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KISL EG

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN ISLAMIST MEETS WITH STAFFDEL HOGREFE

REF: CAIRO 1467

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Matthew Tueller
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. Key Points

-- (C) On August 30, Staffdel Hogrefe, a three-person delegation from the House of Representatives Foreign Relations Committee (and Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights), met with Ibrahim Houdaiby, a grandson and great-grandson of former leaders of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and a self-described former MB member who maintains close ties to the organization. The staffdel scheduled the meeting directly without Embassy involvement.

-- (C) On the recent crackdown of MB leaders and members (ref A), Houdaiby characterized the arrests as part of the GoE's ongoing strategy to weaken the organization by targeting its most pragmatic members, while also sending a message to the West that the organization is a threat.

-- (C) Houdaiby said that the GoE strategy has been effective, citing the MB's poor performance in Egypt's parliament, reduced social services activities, and the tarnishing of the group's reputation through the release in 2007 of what he described as a poorly conceived draft political "platform."

-- (C) Houdaiby said both the MB and the GoE are anxiously awaiting signals from the new U.S. administration on its policy towards dialogue with the group.

Ibrahim Al Houdaiby

¶2. (C) Houdaiby told the delegation that he is great-grandson of Hassan Houdaiby, the MB leader from 1949 to 1973, and grandson of Ma'mun Houdaiby, who served as MB supreme guide from 2002 to 2004. Houdaiby said he was a member of the MB until "last year," when he left the organization. Despite his departure, Houdaiby said he maintains close ties to the MB. In recent years, Houdaiby, an American University of Cairo graduate, has been described as a member of the board of directors of the MB's English language website and told the delegation he served on the committee tasked with formulating the MB's political "platform," a draft of which was released in August 2007. Houdaiby traveled twice to the U.S. in 2008, but said he is now banned from international travel by Egypt's Ministry of Interior.

Recent MB Arrests

¶3. (C) Houdaiby said that prior to 2005, the GoE's strategy

was "containment." Following the MB's success in the 2005 parliamentary elections, the GoE switched to a policy of "rolling back" the group by targeting its financial resources and most pragmatic leaders, and through "media distortions." According to Houdaiby, the GoE's intent is to weaken the MB domestically, while sending a message to the West that the group remains a threat.

¶4. (C) Houdaiby views the GoE strategy as at least partially successful. As an example, Houdaiby attributed the 2007 decision to release what he described as a poorly written and internally inconsistent draft MB "political platform" to the arrest of moderate leaders - such as Essam El Aryin - and their resultant loss of control over the drafting process. Houdaiby also said the performance in recent years of nominally independent but MB-affiliated members of parliament has been poor, something he also attributed to the harassment and arrest of pragmatic MB leaders. Finally, Houdaiby said the MB's social service efforts have deteriorated, are no longer centrally-managed by the organization, and are generally seen as effective only in response to specific events.

MB Internal Affairs

¶5. (C) Houdaiby said the MB is a broad-based group and should not be viewed as a coherent political force. In response to a question from the delegation, Houdaiby aid that if the MB were allowed to fully participate in Egyptian politics, it would split into up to five political parties

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reflecting the diversity of members' views. Houdaiby described Egypt's Al Wasat Party, formed in 2005 by former MB-members and at least one Coptic Christian (and repeatedly denied legal status by the GoE, most recently in August 2009), as the "most moderate manifestation" of the MB. Houdaiby described the MB as "in transition," as it awaits indications from the new U.S. administration on its attitude towards dialogue with the organization.

¶6. (SBU) Staffdel Hogrefe did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

Scobey